

**Jean Blais
Lewiston, Maine
Staff at Central Maine Community College, Auburn, Maine
In Support of L.D. 210**

An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027 (A-132 through A-134 and language EEEE)

**Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

February 7, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Jean Blais. My hometown Lewiston, Maine and I am an administrator at Central Maine Community College. I am here to testify in support of the portion of LD210 that funds the Maine Free College Program and general operating costs at the Maine Community College System.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 210 and its essential funding for the Maine Free College Program.

As a Student Services administrator at Central Maine Community College, I see firsthand the challenges that hinder students' access to higher education—food insecurity, homelessness, mental health struggles, and financial hardship. These barriers are deeply interconnected and often overwhelming. For many, the cost of college isn't just a figure; it determines whether they move forward or fall behind.

The Maine Free College Program is a lifeline. By eliminating tuition costs, it provides students with the financial stability to secure housing, afford basic necessities, and access mental health support. With one less burden to bear, they can build a better future for themselves and for Maine. This program doesn't just make college possible—it makes success attainable. Students enroll with confidence, persist through challenges, and graduate without the weight of crushing debt.

The benefits of free college extend beyond individual students. It fuels Maine's workforce, preparing graduates for in-demand industries while strengthening the state's economy. Whether students enter the job market or continue at a four-year institution, they do so with greater financial security and a stronger foundation for success.

The Maine Free College Program is an investment in the state's future, breaking down barriers and creating lasting opportunities for stability and growth. It empowers students, strengthens communities, and develops a workforce equipped to meet Maine's evolving needs.